

Participant Handout: Myths and Truths about Violence

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Myth	Truth
It is easy for a woman to leave a violent relationship. If a woman remains in a violent relationship, it must be because she enjoys it.	There are personal, social, cultural, religious, and economic reasons that keep a woman in a relationship, even a violent one. Men who are violent against their partners frequently make it difficult for the women to leave. They may make threats (against the woman or their children), ask for forgiveness, promise not to hurt her again, and/or manipulate the victim into thinking that they themselves are the ones to blame.
When a woman says no to sex it is only because she's ashamed to say yes. "No" can mean maybe or even yes.	"No" is always no.
Women provoke rape by the way they behave: wearing provocative clothing, getting drunk, hanging out in the street at night, etc.	No one asks to be sexually victimized. The aggressor is the only one responsible for the crime.
The majority of sexual assaults are committed by strangers.	The majority of sexual assaults are committed by someone the victim already knows. In fact, a large percentage of rapes occur inside the victim's home or at the home of a friend, neighbor, or acquaintance.
Domestic violence is a private matter within the family. No one else should get involved.	Domestic violence is a public health and human rights issue; therefore, it is a problem for all of society. With social support, victims of violence can decide to leave a violent relationship.
Women are safer at home. They are at greater risk from strangers or out of the home.	Contrary to the vision that the family represents a safe refuge, young and adult women are at greater risk of violence in their own homes and at the hands of someone they know.
Sexual violence does not exist within relationships.	Having sex with a woman without her consent is a violation, even if she is a friend, girlfriend, or spouse. Sexual violence is not defined by the type of relationship but by the lack of consent.
A woman who has previously consented to sexual relations with someone cannot be raped by that person.	Any occasion in which a person does not want to have sexual relations but is forced into it is a violation or rape. Accepting kisses and touches does not mean accepting sex. A person can say "NO" to sex at any point, no matter what has happened up to that point.
Violence is caused by drugs and alcohol.	There is no single cause of violence; rather, it is caused by many factors. Drugs and alcohol can increase violent behavior, but many people who use drugs and alcohol are not violent, and many who are violent do not use drugs and alcohol.
Men are violent by nature.	Nearly all researchers of violence agree that although there may be some limited male biological basis for aggressive and risk-taking behavior, the majority of men's violent behavior is explained by social and environmental factors. In sum, boys are not born violent. They are taught to be violent through messages they receive from society and their families. Many men learn to resolve conflicts and maintain their control over other people by using violence. However, just as violence is learned, it can be unlearned.

Myth	Truth
The media makes boys violent.	Some studies have found that viewing violent media images may be associated with carrying out violence, but the causal connection is not entirely clear (Bushman and Anderson 2015). Watching violence on TV or in movies probably does not “cause” boys’ violence, but it can reinforce some of boys’ beliefs—and our general belief as a society—that men’s violence is normal, or even cool.
Violent men are out of control.	A violent person is generally not out of control. Even men who say they lose control when they hurt their partners do not use violence in every situation, nor with every person. They are selectively violent—in other words, their violence is a choice.
Anger causes violence.	People who hurt and mistreat others do not necessarily feel more rage than others; rather, they use their rage as an excuse to justify their behavior, against people who have less power than they do.
Violent men are mentally ill.	Only a small number of men who use violence actually suffer from mental illness. In general, men’s use of violence is not associated with mental illness but with gender norms that uphold violence as an acceptable, or “masculine” means of resolving conflicts.
Women commit as much violence against men as men commit against women.	When there is violence in a relationship between men and women, generally the violence the man commits is more severe. When women utilize violence it is generally in response to a partner’s violence, and in many cases, their partners react with more violence.
Violence is a problem among poor people who lack education.	Violence occurs among all demographic groups, regardless of race, color, class, sexual orientation, occupation, or education.

Reference

Bushman BJ, Anderson CA. 2015. Understanding causality in the effects of media violence. *Am Behav Sci.* 59(14):1807–1821. doi:10.1177/0002764215596554.